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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 000027

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEAN](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [CH](#) [RS](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: DAS MARCIEL DISCUSSES REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE WITH GVN
OFFICIALS

CLASSIFIED BY: Virginia Palmer, CDA; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Vietnam continues to push for a U.S. Presidential visit in 2010 and, less forcefully, for the United States to join the East Asia Summit (EAS). In separate conversations with EAP DAS Marciel, Vietnam's Senior Official for ASEAN and the influential Vice President of Vietnam's Diplomatic Academy (DAV) welcomed the United States' "return" to the region, but warned that U.S. engagement was insufficient to balance China's growing clout. The DAV's Dang Dinh Quy was blunt, warning that senior CPV officials were turning to Russia as a counter to China; Assistant FM Pham Quang Vinh was more circumspect, though he too stressed that Hu Jintao and Dimitri Medvedev had already committed to coming to Hanoi this Fall. Speaking of ASEAN more generally, AFM Vinh said that Vietnam was focused primarily on efforts to build an ASEAN Community by 2015 but was also looking to strengthen ASEAN's external relations; he cited disaster-relief coordination within the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as a good way to build confidence. Vinh affirmed that member countries backed an "ADMM +" mechanism, though important details remained unresolved. Vinh acknowledged that U.S. flexibility on Burma would be difficult to sustain absent a substantive dialogue with the opposition that went beyond the mere staging of an election. DAS Marciel assured his Vietnamese counterparts that the President supported a second U.S.-ASEAN summit but said that a late October visit to Hanoi was unlikely.
END SUMMARY.

Push for a POTUS visit, EAS

12. (C) In separate meetings with EAP DAS Scot Marciel February 5, Vietnam's Senior Official for ASEAN, AFM Pham Quang Vinh, and the Vice President of the MFA-affiliated Diplomatic Academy, Dang Dinh Quy, reiterated Vietnam's invitation for the President to visit Hanoi at the end of October to participate in ASEAN and ARF-related meetings. Quy struck a dramatic note, arguing that while the U.S. "return" in the region was welcome, Vietnam's leaders viewed it as insufficient to counter China's growing influence and were looking to Russia to provide countervailing pressure -- a "dangerous trend" in Quy's mind but one that reflected the "psychology" of several key Politburo members. As an example of growing Russian influence, Russia and Vietnam are close to concluding a deal for Russia to build Vietnam's first commercial nuclear power plant, according to recent press reports and National Assembly member Vu Xuan Hong. Only more substantive engagement and perhaps a Presidential visit would serve to dispel the perception that the United States was not truly committed to the region, Quy insisted. AFM Vinh was less alarmist, but he too emphasized that a Presidential visit to Hanoi would be "extremely important" for ASEAN, reiterating that ASEAN's

foreign ministers had reached a "consensus" that Vietnam should host the second U.S.-ASEAN Summit in Hanoi. Vinh also noted that the Chinese and Russian Presidents had already committed to coming to Vietnam. (Comment: In his current "track one and a half" position, Quy -- a savvy diplomat known for blunt talk -- is frequently employed to articulate positions that, while resonant with GVN policy, are too sensitive for the MFA to own officially. This was Quy's role as the co-leader of Vietnam's delegation to the last two U.S.-Vietnam policy planning discussions. Not coincidentally, a prominent Russian-educated member of Vietnam's National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee, Vu Xuan Hong, delivered a similar message on Russia to DAS Marciel during an informal lunch hosted by the Ambassador the same day. End comment.)

13. (C) Quy and Vinh also urged the United States to participate directly in the East Asia Summit. Quy argued that a U.S. presence in the EAS would bolster Vietnam's ability to maintain an independent foreign policy, a guiding principle for Vietnamese diplomacy that Quy said was jeopardized by China's increasing might and the resulting impulse to lean to Russia. (Note: MFA DG for the Americas, Nguyen Ba Hung told DAS Marciel earlier in the day that PM Dung had endorsed an Indonesia proposal that the United States play a central role in the EAS. Septel. End note.) AFM Vinh was again more guarded, saying that while it favored U.S. participation in EAS, Vietnam would have to consult with other member states. Vinh declined to characterize China's views but said that there was a consensus within EAS that the summit should be "inclusive," with

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both Russia and the United States viewed as eventual participants. Vinh said that with the U.S. decision to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, there were no more "technical" obstacles to U.S. involvement in the EAS. DAS Marciel cautioned that while the United States was "interested" in the EAS, at this stage it was still seeking other countries' views, especially on how the EAS would fit with other pieces of the regional architecture, APEC most particularly. Vinh sought to be reassuring, arguing that EAS and APEC were complementary not competing: while APEC's main brief remained economic security and trade, EAS was a "high-level policy forum" better suited for "strategic questions."

14. (C) DAS Marciel assured his counterparts that the President valued the U.S.-ASEAN Summit mechanism and was committed to meeting again in 2010. A Presidential visit to Hanoi at the end of October was unrealistic, however, given that the President had committed to traveling to Seoul and Tokyo to attend the G20 and APEC meetings in mid November. More likely, DAS Marciel noted, was a New York summit in connection with UNGA, unless something could be worked out in Asia in connection with the G20/APEC trip. Both Quy and Vinh seemed prepared for this response. While reiterating the "need" for a Presidential-level summit, preferably in Hanoi, the two said that Vietnam was prepared to be flexible with the timing (for both the US-ASEAN Leaders' Meeting and the EAS) though Vinh noted China and Russia also had scheduling concerns. (Vinh also reminded DAS Marciel that Vietnam wanted to participate in the G20.) DAS Marciel stressed that as far as the U.S.-ASEAN Summit was concerned, it was simply a question of scheduling. Alluding to his more difficult conversation with MPS Vice Minister Nguyen Van Huong earlier that day (septel), DAS Marciel told AFM Vinh that Vietnam could, however, do more to make itself a more attractive site for a bilateral visit.

Visions for ASEAN, China, South China Sea

15. (C) In each of his meetings, DAS Marciel stressed that the

United States was committed to becoming an even stronger partner with ASEAN, and that our goal was to help ASEAN ensure member countries' prosperity, security, and independence. Emphasizing "independence," DAS Marciel added that the United States had no designs on ASEAN and believed that no country in the region should become too dependent on any one power. A key piece of this was economic, he said, noting that successful economic integration would facilitate progress on ASEAN's other two pillars (political/security and social/economic). AFM Vinh concurred, arguing that Vietnam held a similar vision for ASEAN. Vietnam's primary focus for its chairmanship would be to support internal efforts to build an ASEAN Community by 2015, Vinh said, but added that Vietnam would also look to strengthen ASEAN's external relations, both through ARF and through the various "ASEAN +" mechanisms. Vinh cited connectivity as a priority, first within ASEAN and then with the region as a whole; he also mentioned the ASEAN single window as a key step toward establishing a single market by 2015. On ARF, Vinh highlighted discussions on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief as a particularly fruitful area of cooperation. While not specifically mentioning Status of Forces Agreements, Vinh said that he agreed with the U.S. assessment that it was not enough to respond to a crisis when it occurs; countries must prepare in advance by ironing out the procedures for cross-border cooperation, including among member countries' militaries. Vinh said that member countries agreed that the ADMM should be expanded, though the precise mechanism remains undecided. (Note: In a conversation last week, reftel, Vinh's subordinate, MFA DDG Vu Ho, indicated that there was now informal agreement on an "ADMM+8" framework. End note.)

16. (C) Both Vinh and Quy took DAS Marciel's message on "independence" as an opportunity to raise Vietnam's concerns about China and the South China Sea. Vinh said that at Davos Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung had reiterated Vietnam's position that the matter should be resolved peacefully and in accord with the 1982 UN Law of the Sea. Vietnam's approach was pragmatic, Vinh emphasized.

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Vietnam acknowledged that China preferred to handle the issue with individual claimants on a bilateral basis; although Vietnam did not share this view, this was not a point that Vietnam argued directly with China. Vinh also conceded that it was difficult to coordinate within ASEAN -- not only do some countries not have a stake in the territorial dispute, there remain significant disagreements among those ASEAN countries that do have claims. The best approach, Vinh said, was to put sovereignty claims aside and to make progress on confidence building measures by building on the Declaration of Conduct. This too was difficult, though, because, "like it or not," even the most basic confidence-building measures turned back to sovereignty issues. Quy was more alarmist, stressing that Vietnam had "big problems" with China. Along the Tonkin Gulf meridian line, for example -- an area supposedly not in dispute -- Vietnamese ships engaged in oil exploration faced daily intimidation, with Chinese fighter jets flying as low as 200 meters and naval vessels approaching within 500 meters.

Burma

17. (C) "Burma's generals are hard to love," DAS Marciel told AFM Vinh, explaining that U.S. flexibility had so far not been reciprocated. Holding elections in 2010 would not be sufficient, if the Burmese elections were not also part of a larger process involving a genuine, inclusive dialogue between the generals and Aung San Suu Kyi. Absent such a dialogue, it would be difficult to sustain the current U.S. stance, DAS Marciel stressed, adding that ASSK was a realist and understood that the generals would not simply yield power. "We know that," Vinh responded without further elaboration. Asked if the Burmese had set a date for elections,

AFM Vinh backed away from an earlier report that FM Nyan Win had mentioned May during January's ASEAN Foreign Ministers retreat in Danang.

18. (U) This cable was cleared by DAS Marciel.
Palmer